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Lawrence K. White

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*Duty . . . Honor . . . Country*

## COLONEL LAWRENCE K. WHITE \*

R. Jack Smith

Not surprisingly, Sherman Kent, that master of the pungent phrase, best summed up Col. Lawrence K. "Red" White. "That splendid character—solid gold all the way through!" Somewhat more analytically but equally admiringly, Enno "Hank" Knoche, who served a stint as Red's executive assistant, commented: "What amazes me is that he always knows the best thing to do—immediately—and it's always the most direct and the simplest thing. I once asked his wife, Sue, whether this was only an office characteristic or was he always like that. She said he was always like that. She could wake him out of a sound sleep in the middle of the night with a complicated problem to solve, and he would give her the answer without hesitating and go back to sleep."

Red White acquired many admirers besides Sherman Kent and Hank Knoche during his 25 years of service in CIA, the last six and a half of which he served as Executive Director-Comptroller. He had so many admirers and well-wishers, in fact, that when it came time for him to retire in January 1972 it was necessary to hold three retirement parties in order to accommodate all the Agency men and women who wanted to pay homage to Red and wish him godspeed. No other Agency officer, in my experience, has commanded so much respect and affection. His was a splendid career.

It began in a small town on the western edge of Tennessee where Red's father was a Presbyterian minister. His boyhood there in the early 1920s sounds like real-life Horatio Alger: working as a farmhand from sun-up to sun-down for a dollar a day; delivering groceries with a horse and buggy from "opening to closing" for a dollar and a half; and, in his middle teens, digging ditches for the local water company and stacking lumber at the lumber yard for 10 hours a day for \$2.50.

When Red graduated from Troy High School in 1920 with a class of 23, his future looked unpromising. To be sure there were still ditches to dig and lumber to stack but he wanted badly to break free from the tight confines of the small town. He knew that a college education was the answer but there was no money to fund it. The avenue he eventually found was the United States Military Academy at West Point, and how that came about is an amazing story in itself.

Red is an inveterate story teller. He always has one available to illustrate a point in the conversation, a true account of some incident in his career, and he tells it masterfully, with rich detail, simulated accent and tone of voice, and warm humor. The best story he tells, in my judgment, is the account of his obtaining the appointment to West Point. In the spring of 1929, as Red tells it, he became aware by a friend that through the Army it was possible to receive a free college education and be paid at the same time. Realistically, it was far too late in the year for Red to pursue the possibility but out of mingled naivete and determination he set about anyway. Through his Boy Scout Scoutmaster who had served as an Army chaplain in World War I he reached

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\* With the publication of Jack Smith's affectionate portrait of Colonel White, the Board of *Studies* launches what it hopes will be a continuing series of authoritative sketches of Agency "greats" written by their contemporaries. Jack Smith's turn will come—the Editor.

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the district's congressman, a rising young star whom the party wished to reward. The region's military academy appointments had already been made for the fall term but the young congressman was able to obtain an alternate appointment for Red. Lightning struck when the principal appointee for West Point failed his entrance examination, which Red because of his belated application had been unable to take. Appointment with the class entering 1 July 1929 was offered to Red contingent upon his producing a satisfactory high school record and graduation certificate.

This presented a major problem. The Troy High School was closed up tighter than a bank vault, and the principal had taken up summer residence in a Kentucky town 75 miles away. Doggedly, Red made his way there and found his man among the hardware, harnesses, and groceries of a general store. "But Lawrence," the principal objected, "I can't make out a transcript for you here. All the records are back there in Troy." Then, seeing the pain and sharp disappointment sweep over the honest, open face, he said, "Well, sit down. Let's see if we can *estimate* your grades." Then, as Red tells it, ensued a bargaining session in which Red set as high a grade for each course as he dared and the principal lowered it to a level he thought reasonable. Even so, they ended up with an "estimated" record that Red says could easily have made him class valedictorian.

It did the trick. Back from the Academy came notification of his appointment and an order to present himself in West Point, New York on 1 July with cash in hand for needed supplies and equipment. Counting transportation costs that came to \$375. New problem: that amount of cash looked unreachable. Red took his story and his problem to three of the town's richest men, two business men and a dentist. They responded by jointly putting together \$375 and turning it over to Red without asking him to sign a note or present collateral of any kind. They merely told him to pay them back when he could. People learned early in Red White's life that he was a man to trust.

The cultural shock to the youngster from rural Tennessee, younger than all but two or three of the others, entering an academic environment where the average plebe had a year or more of special coaching or one or more years of college, was stupendous. The military discipline and the athletic requirements were no problem, but the academic workload was at a level for which Troy High School had not prepared him and, as Red says, "the first three months nearly killed me." He survived by dint of unrelenting hard work, and he graduated in June 1933 with a ranking of 287 out of 347, approximately 75 cadets having failed to complete the course. His Army career began as a second lieutenant, salary \$125 a month with free quarters and \$18 for subsistence.

It began tranquilly in the Sixth Infantry at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri where he met Elizabeth Jane (Sue) Flint of St. Louis whom he married in 1937 after finishing Infantry School at Fort Benning. They were posted first to Fort Sam Houston and then to Zamboanga in the Philippines. When war clouds began to gather over the Pacific in 1941, wife Sue and baby Susan were sent home and Red followed in September on his way to training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Promotions came quickly: captain, 1941; major, early 1942; lieutenant colonel, late 1942; and full colonel, 1943—at age 31!

Red's wartime career began in earnest in September 1942 when he returned to the Pacific theater, joining the 37th Division in Fiji. The names that subsequently appear in his record jacket are familiar: New Hebrides, Guadalcanal, New Georgia, Bougainville, Luzon. As Red says, it was the New Georgia campaign that gave him his first baptism of fire, "and much more." Immediately after that he led an advance detachment of 16 ashore at Vella la vella, debarking from rubber boats three days

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ahead of the main assault, an intensely dangerous but successful operation. Then late in 1943 he took command of the 148th Infantry Regiment and led it into the prolonged battle for Bougainville.

The climax of Red White's career came in early 1945, a brilliant but also disastrous climax. Commanding the 148th, Red led the advance from Lingayen to the outskirts of Manila. Upon entering the city they found and released 1,300 American military prisoners at Old Bilibid. Then the 148th made the first successful crossing of the Pasig River at Malcanan Palace, overcame determined resistance at the Paco railway station, released thousands of patients and refugees held in captivity in Philippine General Hospital, and captured the last remaining government buildings held by the Japanese. For all these feats of arms the 148th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Lawrence K. White, Commanding received a Presidential Unit Citation.

But the 148th and its Commander were not finished yet. They turned northward from Manila to take part in the assault on the mountain stronghold of Baguio. Six miles short of that objective the 148th's commander met disaster. One of the tanks leading the advancing column slid off the edge of the mountain road down a cliff. The column halted to tend the wounded and to re-group and during the pause Red went ahead on foot to see what lay beyond a hairpin curve. He met head-on a Japanese tank-led suicidal attack, and was seriously wounded in the fierce fighting that followed. He spent the next two years progressing from one hospital to the next. In March 1947 Red was retired from active service for the wounds he had received in combat.

The Army career was over but the proud record remains, bespangled with medals, decorations, and letters of commendation. The Army honored Red with the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Clusters, the Bronze Star Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters. But the letters of commendation from superior officers may be even more impressive. Lt. General O. W. Griswold, his Corps Commander, wrote, "one of the best and most skilful regimental commanders I have ever seen," an officer whose "bravery is such that he never asked a subordinate to go where he himself would not lead," a man whose "honesty and integrity are superior." Major General Robert S. Beightler, his Division Commander, was even more outspoken: "I can say, without hesitation and with complete sincerity, that Colonel White was the best regimental commander who served in my command during the entire war; for that matter, he was the most capable regimental commander I saw anywhere in the South Pacific." And for top dressing, "I don't think there was any officer in the Division more truly beloved by his subordinates . . . than was Colonel White."

Fresh out of the hospital, in fact still on convalescent leave, Red White took the suggestion of an Army friend and walked into the offices of the Central Intelligence Group. To the good fortune of both Red and CIG/CIA he was immediately taken on and made deputy chief of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, shortly later becoming chief. FBIS was a wartime operation just taken over by CIG, and the immediate task was to restructure it for peacetime intelligence operation. It was a tough managerial challenge which Red met with his usual blend of fair, objective inquiry and firm, impartial decision. During the next five years FBIS became a lean, effective organization and, with the construction of new stations on both the East and West coasts of the United States and on Cyprus and Okinawa, and the forging of a reciprocal arrangement with the British Broadcasting Corporation, it became a truly global operation as well. In later years, as Red looked back, he thought fondly of his FBIS days: "best job in the Agency," In fact, he always maintained a protective stance toward the unit, as I discovered when I as Deputy Director for Intelligence wished to

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make some top-level personnel changes in FBIS and faced some tough questions from Red as to the qualifications of my candidates. "Those jobs are too good to waste on mediocre people."

After this auspicious beginning, White's star began to rise rapidly, especially after the arrival of Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith as Director of CIA. Beedle Smith, General Eisenhower's hard-jawed Chief of Staff and hatchet-man, demanded high performance—results not excuses—and he insisted on cleanly demarcated lines of responsibility. It did not take Beedle Smith long to discover the quietly effective Colonel White, and he soon began to seek his judgment and to assign him tasks which lay altogether outside Red's normal job. General Smith soon took care of that anomaly by making Red Assistant Deputy Director for Administration. At the same time, in order to streamline administration throughout the Agency and to clarify responsibilities, Beedle Smith decreed that henceforth all elements of CIA would rely on the central administrative and support system instead of maintaining their own separate facilities for personnel services, logistics, and other support functions. Then Beedle privately informed Red he expected him to make the central system work.

It was an exceedingly challenging and difficult task, especially in those inchoate years in the early 1950s when CIA was a conglomerate of disparate functions but hardly a unified organization. The Clandestine Services, in particular, found it hard to accept such integration, on security grounds as well as others, and when it came to the sensitive matters of specialized procurement, logistics, and communications they felt they had needs which could not properly be met by a centralized support system. Nonetheless, it was General Beedle Smith's order that one be established forthwith, and Red set about the formidable task of winning confidence and making it work.

By this time, early 1952, Allen Dulles had left his New York law office to rejoin the United States intelligence service, and it was with Dulles as Deputy Director (Plans) that Red had to deal on support for the Clandestine Services. Dulles was as skeptical as anyone about the desirability and feasibility of the central support concept, but gradually as these two men of good will worked together a mutual respect, confidence, and trust became established. This was officially recognized in 1954 when Dulles, by then DCI, promoted Red to Deputy Director (Administration) instead of bringing in an outsider with national reputation as had been his original intention. Then, in early 1955 a bureaucratic foul-up in support enraged Dulles and caused him to decree categorically to Red and Deputy Director (Plans) Frank Wisner that henceforth he would hold White personally responsible for all Agency administrative and support activities—no matter when or where they took place. Moreover, effective at once, all the personnel, communications, and training activities of the Agency were to come under Red's domain, and he was to be given a new title: Deputy Director (*Support*).

Back in 1952, when Bedell Smith had told Red he expected him to make the central support system work, he had also laid on him another gigantic task: over-all responsibility for coordinating the planning and construction of the "new building." This initiative of the Eisenhower Administration, born out of an interest in decentralizing sensitive government installations to make them less vulnerable to strategic attack, as well as a desire to get CIA out of the hodge-podge of temporary buildings and old relics it then occupied throughout downtown Washington, was felt by most Agency professionals to be a long-distance and quite unattractive mirage. But White had been given the task to perform, and he set about it with quiet persistence, feeling pretty lonely much of the time. To his surprise, Red found Dulles to be an enthusiastic ally. The two spent long hours exploring sites, studying architectural plans, and meeting with Congressional committees whose sanction was essential. Perhaps it was these long and frequent meetings that did most to forge the bonds of confidence

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between them. Allen Dulles loved the new building and took enormous pride in it, feeling perhaps that it would serve as a monument to him. He felt special affection and gratitude to the man who had worked so tirelessly to bring it into being—Red White.

Red tells dozen of stories about the Langley building but one of them is particularly useful to re-tell, the story of the highway signs at the George Washington Parkway and Chain Bridge Road entrances. (The pertinence of this story becomes renewed annually when *The Washington Post* re-prints the canard that the Agency sought to hide its existence until right-thinking officials and, naturally, the power of the press forced it to come out of hiding.) Shortly after the Langley building was opened for business Allen Dulles ordered entrance signs to be put up. He was led to do this in part by an incident which had occurred earlier involving President Eisenhower and his brother Milton. Milton had a Saturday morning appointment with Bedell Smith and Allen Dulles, so after their breakfast at the White House the two Eisenhower brothers set out to find CIA Headquarters which was sitting unmarked at 2430 E Street Northwest. The President of the United States was unable to find the office of his Director of Central Intelligence and with his brother angrily returned to the White House. Milton was then retrieved by Agency car and delivered to his appointment an hour late. Bedell Smith took due notice of this episode and a sign proclaiming the site of CIA was promptly erected.

The Kennedy Administration took office not long after Langley was opened, and by chance Robert F. Kennedy, took up residence in the neighborhood. As a consequence, Bobby Kennedy passed the CIA entrance signs twice daily to and from work. He found them jarring. "The British don't advertise their secret service. Those signs should come down." President John F. Kennedy acceded to his brother's view and ordered Allen Dulles to take the signs down. "But, Mr. President," protested Dulles, "those signs help contractors and suppliers find the place. Besides, the location is marked on every Exxon and National Geographic map of Washington. We can't hide from the American people." The President was adamant, however, so Dulles acquiesced verbally but in accord with sound bureaucratic practice took no action, thinking that the request might be forgotten. Unfortunately, Bobby Kennedy continued to go to the office every day, and each day became irritated afresh by the signs. He complained once more, and the President got Allen Dulles on the telephone one Friday morning. "Allen, if those signs are not taken down today, I'll come out tomorrow and take them down myself." Dulles gave in, and as usual, turned the problem over to Red. He asked the Director of National Parks to take the signs down "as quietly as possible." Sometime after midnight they came down and for several years afterward the two entrances were marked only by the Bureau of Public Roads signs, thus providing merriment for *The Washington Post*.

Before leaving this account of Red White's thirteen and a half years as Deputy Director (Administration/Support) it should be stressed that considerably more than the empathy he established with Allen Dulles was responsible for the success of the central support system. From the outset Red had a plan for developing a professional support corps whose experience would range widely over the Agency's manifold activities and would include as a minimum: (1) a tour in a central support office in Headquarters; (2) a tour in a DDP area division; and (3) a tour in a station overseas. Such a program required six years, at a minimum, just to establish a foundation on which to build. But Red was granted the necessary time by General Smith and his successors, and the plan bore a most successful fruit. Anyone who has served overseas and had observed the contrast between CIA support services and those, let us say, of the Department of State can vouch for the success of the Smith-White concept.



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Professionalism and a willingness to serve, a Can-Do approach, mark the work of the CIA support people, traits which reflect exactly two dominant characteristics of their founder.

This willingness-to-serve approach sometimes was extended by White to very small details. For example, Sherman Kent's favorite pencils. Sherman, an inveterate creator of complex, convoluted doodles, favored a certain kind of draughtsman's pencils for his artistic work, and usually bought them himself and carried a half dozen or so in his breast pocket. At a DCI meeting one morning, Sherm examined the #3 pencil beside the yellow pad at his place and then threw it down in disgust. "Can't write with one of those things!" From his place beside Sherm, Red looked on with interest, as Sherm took one of his stubby pencils out and began to construct something resembling a cluster of oyster eggs as seen through a high-powered microscope. "You like those pencils better? Could I try one?" "Sure. Try a decent pencil for a change." Red took the gift pencil back to his office after the meeting. He called in his administrative assistant and said, "Get me a gross of pencils just like this." When Sherm arrived at his office at 8 o'clock next morning he found sitting in the center of his desk a gross of his favorite pencils.

In 1965 several changes took place at the top of the Agency: Admiral William F. Raborn replaced John McCone as DCI; Richard Helms replaced General Marshall as DDCI; and Red White, at Dick Helm's invitation, replaced Lyman Kirkpatrick as Executive Director-Comptroller. About a year and a half later, Admiral Raborn left and Richard Helms succeeded him as DCI. Helms was the last of the line of DCI's for whom Red had served. Reminiscing about this, Red says:

I served under Vandenberg, Hillenkoetter, Smith, Dulles, McCone, Raborn, and Helms. Each had different problems and made different contributions. I felt closest to and most admired Smith, Dulles, and Helms. Beedle set up a sensible organization and established the DCI in a position of preeminence. Who else could have done it at that point in history? Allen Dulles attracted and kept a lot of great people while the Agency grew into a professional shop. Neither of these two great men, however, had Helms' problems. They lived in a time of plenty, during which the mystique of Intelligence was accepted on faith in most quarters and especially in Congress. All this had vanished when Helms became Director. Tighter budgets and tighter personnel ceilings, great rivalry within the Community, particularly over scientific and technical programs, skepticism about estimates in the White House, and a greatly intensified investigative interest on the part of Congress. The honeymoon was over! . . . I have the highest regard for Dick Helms and the manner in which he handled the very difficult and complex problems with which it was his duty to deal.

It fell to White to take a leading role in dealing with the budgetary problems created by the new austerity. His response was to create under John Clarke a staff responsible for Agency-wide coordination of programming, budgeting, and management. The shrieks and groans from the Deputy Directors were deafening (I was as vocal as any), but the new system soon found its legs. For the first time CIA had an integrated planning and budget process—essential once the days of unlimited budgets had passed.

The Executive Director—Comptroller job was always something of an anomaly, something more than a staff job but a little less than a command-line post. Red says that he thought of himself "as having considerable influence but not really great authority. I saw myself more as an *honest broker*." It probably was as an "honest broker" that he made his most effective contribution to the Agency. As DDI I know

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that I found him enormously helpful that way. Every lieutenant knows that certain problems are best presented to his chief not by himself but by a disinterested third party. The problem may be an old one with a painful history, or one of peculiar interest to the lieutenant, or difficult to discuss for any of a variety of reasons. Whenever I sought Red's advice on how to approach Dick Helms on one of the sticky ones, Red would say, "I'll ask him. He may get sore but I don't mind. I'll ask him." Observing the straightforward simplicity with which Red said this I knew that he would put the question to Dick in its best light, no twists or innuendoes, and the answer he would get would be the best anyone could get. Red had a wonderfully simple way of putting the most complex questions. He seemed to retain a calm detachment and, perhaps because he felt no involvement or embarrassment himself, the issue emerged shed of all emotion, as transparent as clear water. The person questioned, feeling no threat, found it easier to respond without resentment or anger. It is the same skill essentially that enabled White with blinding directness to tell an officer he had failed miserably or committed an unimaginable stupidity, without raising a single hackle on the offender's neck. It stunned and convinced but did not sting.

Dick Helms, in a glowing farewell statement at Red White's retirement ceremony in the Agency auditorium on 23 February 1972, paid tribute to this Honest Broker role:

He has never come to me with a proposition from any of you without presenting it forthrightly, accurately, and fairly. He has never taken advantage of the fact he had that private time with me to push his own marbles on his own point of view. . . . As we would have these daily sessions late in the afternoon to clean up the Agency's business, I remember on various occasions I would notice him rather settle his backside in the chair a little more firmly than normal, and that was the signal he was about to bring forward something he knew I did not want to approve, or something that was absolutely beyond the pale as far as I was concerned and had made myself felt on the subject many times before. But he would brace himself, and then he would say, "Now I know you are not going to like this—" So I would settle down and say, "All right, I'm not going to like it, so I might as well be a good sport about it." But interestingly enough, Red always knew when to stop, always knew when to retreat and regather his forces, always knew that there might be a better day, if I was in a bad mood. He had that remarkable sense of knowing when to stick his nose into somebody else's business and when to keep it out—which I must say is something everyone might learn and learn from him.

And over and above all this, his counsel has been wise and sensible—he has been fair to everyone—and as he leaves the Agency today we are sad, and genuinely so, to see him go. He will be sorely missed. He has meant a great deal to all of us, and he has been a tower of strength to me.

When Dick Helms had finished this handsome description of the way Red White carried out his duties and had honored Red's fairness, his tact, and his good sense, he must have felt that although everything he had said to that point was true there was still more to say. Like Red White's World War II Army generals, like Allen Dulles, and like all the rest of us, he felt that an account of the manner in which Red did his work did not adequately sum up the man. So Dick turned for help elsewhere:

I was looking over some writing the other day and as I re-read it, it seemed to me that these words describe Red White better than I can do it, May I read them:

He was incapable of fear, meeting personal dangers with the calmest unconcern. Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was prudence,

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never acting until every circumstance, every consideration was maturely weighed. Refraining if he saw a doubt, but when once decided, going through with his purpose, whatever obstacles opposed. His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known. No motives of interest or consanguinity, of friendship or hatred, being able to bias his decision. He was indeed in every sense of the words a wise and a good man.

Those words are part of an appraisal of George Washington written by Thomas Jefferson. They fit Red White very well indeed.

To these words of honor by Thomas Jefferson and by Richard Helms this writer has nothing to add.